



FAQ: Warrant Article 14 & the Municipal Fossil Fuel-Free Building Demonstration Program

What is Warrant Article 14?

The Clean Energy Future Committee (CEFC) has proposed a warrant article to see if Town Meeting will amend and re-enact the Town's Clean Heat Bylaw. In 2020, nearly 92% of Town Meeting Members voted to pass this bylaw, which proposed to ban fossil fuels in new construction and major renovations. However, the state legislature and MA Attorney General did not grant Arlington authority to implement our Clean Heat Bylaw. Re-enacting this bylaw is now required for the Town to use the route that the legislature created: the Municipal Fossil Fuel-Free Building Demonstration Program.

What is the Municipal Fossil Fuel-Free Building Demonstration Program?

In 2022, the MA legislature passed a law requiring the MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER) to establish a demonstration program in which 10 municipalities may adopt local legislation requiring new building construction or major renovation projects to be fossil fuel-free. This program responds to the efforts of several communities, including Arlington, to pass bylaws or ordinances that require new construction and major renovations to be fossil fuel-free.

Why does the Municipal Fossil Fuel-Free Building Demonstration Program matter?

The use of fossil fuels to heat, cool, and power buildings is responsible for the bulk of Arlington's climate-changing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. By participating in the Demonstration Program, we ensure that new and renovated buildings in Arlington won't use fossil fuels, won't lock in new sources of GHG emissions, and won't require costly retrofits down the line. This strategy is widely acknowledged as crucial to the successful achievement of local and regional GHG reduction goals, including Arlington's goal of net zero GHG emissions by 2050.

What are the key changes proposed in the updated bylaw amendment?

Much of the updated bylaw is identical to the bylaw that Town Meeting approved in 2020, with two key exceptions. First, the text is more closely aligned with the Model Rule that DOER developed for the Demonstration Program and with the Specialized Stretch Code, which will streamline implementation for Town staff. Second, the updated bylaw removes an exemption for indoor cooking appliances, because research since 2020 has shown that gas stoves are responsible for 15% of childhood asthma cases in MA. There are still exemptions for research and medical facilities, hot water for large multifamily buildings, generators, repairs to unsafe piping, and modifications of existing fossil fuel heating systems. Also, like the original bylaw, the updated bylaw includes a waivers and appeals process for situations in which electric systems would cost too much or be impractical.

Didn't we just pass a building code that bans fossil fuels?

No. In the spring of 2023, Town Meeting approved by a wide margin the Specialized Stretch Energy Code, which strongly favors all-electric new construction but does not prohibit fossil fuel use and does not apply to major renovations. Only participation in the Demonstration Program will allow Arlington to make new construction and major renovations fossil fuel-free.



Questions? Contact Sustainability Manager Talia Fox at tfox@town.arlington.ma.us

Submitted by the Clean Energy Future Committee